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'Gold Star Taxi' gave free rides

BY JAY GROSSMAN
STAFF WRITER

Need a lift? Call Gerry Carlin. Oakland County Sheriff's deputies at the Rochester Hills station were frequently ordered by Carlin to taxi politicians and business leaders to the airport, the doctor's office and even the beauty parlor, according to an investigation conducted by the county prosecutor's office.

Doris Keyton, the former top aide to Rochester Hills Mayor Billie Ireland, loved to use the "Gold Star Taxi," as it was commonly known.

In her interview with the prosecutor's office, Keyton admitted that deputies drove her on several occasions to the doctor's office while she was undergoing physical therapy for her knee.

A deputy once drove Keyton and her husband back and forth to the airport for a vacation in Florida. Keyton said she thought the deputy was off-duty.

Several deputies assigned to the "Gold Star Taxi" told investigators they took Keyton to the beauty shop more than once. She denies ever getting a ride to the hairdresser.

Keyton wasn't the only one getting free taxi rides from Rochester Hills deputies.

'Miss Daisy' rides again

County Executive L. Brooks Patterson was driven around so much during his 1992 political campaign that Rochester Hills deputies referred to the assignment as Driving Miss Daisy, after the popular film.

The deputies also gave frequent lifts to Waterford auto dealer Al Dittich and Rudy Lozano, the county road commission chairman. Both are Patterson supporters and close friends of Carlin.

In separate interviews, both denied knowing

the deputies who gave them rides were on duty.

Carlin used his authority to help get Patterson elected, transforming the Rochester Hills station into Patterson's 1992 campaign headquarters.

Sgt. Dale Miller told investigators that when Carlin was running the station, he frequently took deputies off their assigned duties so they could drive Patterson to fund-raisers and other social events. He said there were at least five deputies who were frequently placed on the driving detail.

Even the clerical help was involved in getting Patterson elected.

Miller said the station's two police secretaries sometimes didn't have enough time to type detective reports because they were so busy working on the Patterson campaign. He said it was common for the secretaries to take their work home with them.

Looking for donors

Contributions to Patterson's campaign were encouraged at the station. According to Miller, Carlin asked everyone at the station to supply a list of five to 10 people who could be solicited for political contributions to Patterson.

Miller emphasized the secretaries and the deputies worked at Carlin's specific direction. He also told investigators it's unlikely Patterson didn't know he was being driven in county vehicles, since the cars were fitted with police radios and other gear.

Patterson claims he thought the deputies were volunteering their time and driving privately-owned vehicles. An excerpt from an interview included:

Investigator: "I just wondered that, if in your opinion, what the chances are if someone took me around there and they took me there, but I didn't know it was a police car. I thought

it was his own personal car."

Miller: "If you have any knowledge of police equipment in vehicles I would think that you should be able to put that together. I doubt very much anyone is going to hide that radio."

Before taking office, Patterson served as the county prosecutor for 16 years.

Carlin, 38, is charged with 33 criminal counts following a 10-month probe into the Rochester Hills station. Prior to the charges, Carlin was demoted from captain to a jail sergeant. He's now suspended without pay, pending the outcome of his case.

In several past interviews, Carlin has adamantly denied ever ordering deputies to drive Patterson while they were on duty. But Miller told investigators he personally witnessed Carlin taking documents from the station that show he approved of the driving detail.

Carlin's doghouse

Not everyone drove for Carlin. Miller said several detectives, including himself, made excuses to avoid driving.

Turning down a request from Carlin, though, could put a person into the doghouse. Investigator: "Did you ever feel pressured by him?"

Miller: "Oh, absolutely."

Investigator: "You did?"

Miller: "Absolutely."

Investigator: "Did he ever make any negative comments?"

Miller: "No, it was kind of like the way he treated you when you didn't do something he wanted you to do. He kind of treated you like you weren't one of his favorites, or something like that. There was a definite division there between the group that did and the group that didn't."

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